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ABSTRACT

Pericles' Funeral Oration, delivered at a mass funeral for a number of Athenian soldiers who had died during an attack against their rival Sparta's allies, is an example of a form of rhetoric, epideictic, that functioned as a means of developing a sense of community. In order to make the mourners at the funeral believe the soldiers had died good, noble deaths, Pericles reaffirmed their sense of identity as a community by contrasting the Athenian philosophy and lifestyle enthymematically with those of Sparta. Athenians were portrayed as open, educated, brave, independent, and possessing a democracy for everyone, rather than for a privileged few. By implication, the Spartans were seen as xenophobic, brutish, cowardly, and discriminatory against those citizens who were not members of their elitist oligarchy. Hence, grief was converted to pride in the mourners, and the soldiers appeared noble in dying for such a good form of government. However, such an oration had the unfortunate side effect of disenfranchising Athens from the larger cultural community of the Greek city-states because it emphasized Athens' uniqueness and independence. After the collapse of the relations between the city-states, Athens was isolated and defeated. Because the Athenians' sense of community had been reaffirmed at the expense of a larger community, they unwittingly destroyed the source of their own strength. (JC)

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THE COST OF ACHIEVING COMMUNITY: PERICLES' FUNERAL ORATION

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THE COST OF ACHIEVING COMMUNITY:
PERICLES' FUNERAL ORATION

Pericles' Funeral Oration is one of the most famous of the speeches of antiquity. The classicist Harding notes that it is "the best known single specimen of Thucydides' History" and that "in a collection of the world's great orations the 'Funeral Oration' would rank just above or co-equal with Demosthenes' 'On the Crown' and Cicero's 'Philippics.'"[1] It is not my purpose here to disagree with that assessment but rather to inquire into the effects that such rhetorical artistry could have had on the Greek sense of community. I will argue in this paper that Pericles' speech typified a pattern of Athenian rhetoric that in the short run nourished the Athenian sense of community but over the long run depleted the ecological source of that community, which was the larger community of Greek city-states.

The fact that rhetoric plays a key role in binding together the community is not a new discovery. Cicero discusses it in De Officiis.[2] What seems to be new is the appreciation of the part that epideictic rhetoric plays in developing that sense of community. Hart argues that epideictic has such a role when he writes, "Through rhetorical transactions--even so-called empty rhetorical transactions like campaign speeches, patriotic orations, and political prayer breakfasts--people can derive as much consensus as they

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[1] H. F. Harding, The Speeches of Thucydides with a General Introduction and Introductions for the Main Speeches and the Military Harangues (Lawrence, KA: Coronado P, 1973) 2, 52.

[2] Cicero, De Officiis, 1.7.

desire." He concludes that "there are strong reasons to believe that notions of community can and do come to exist because of rhetorical experience."[3] Rosenfield and Mader argue that rhetoric functions to give pleasure; and the first motif of pleasure they cite is identification with a community since community offers the "joys of relationship."

> "Who am I?" is answered by examining one's relationship to family, community, religious affiliation, club, or clan. All demand acknowledgment of some formula or ritual. Ceremonial events reify bonds of trust and sanctify the group. Ritual both commemorates and reinforces the values of the individual and the community.[4]

The need to reaffirm a sense of identity as a community is especially strong during times of crisis. Pericles' Funeral Oration takes place at such a time. The burial of the war dead was a communal ritual, and the function of giving pleasure in these circumstances becomes a function of reducing the pain of grief.

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[3] Roderick P. Hart, "The Functions of Human Communication in the Maintenance of Public Values," Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory, ed. C. Arnold and J. Bowers (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984) 762.

[4] Lawrence W. Rosenfield and Thomas F. Mader, "The Functions of Human Communication in Pleasing," Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory, ed. C. Arnold and J. Bowers (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984) 478-79.

Pericles Reinforces Athens as Community

Pericles' Funeral Oration is the earliest example we have of what appears to have been a well-established genre in Athens.[5] These orations, or epitaphioi, were given at collective funerals for the war dead.[6] Thucydides tells us that a man of high reputation in the city was chosen to speak on these occasions.[7] In the winter of 431 BC, the chosen speaker was Pericles, the leading political figure in Athens.[8] Pericles held the position of strategos (general), one of the few powerful offices in the Athenian democracy that, rather than being chosen by lot, was elective and could be determined by merit.

The occasion for the public funeral was the burial of those who had died in the war against Sparta and its allies. The war had erupted earlier in the year, shattering a 14-year truce. Spartan forces invaded Attica and laid waste to the area around Athens. Under the leadership of Pericles, the Athenians did not meet the main force of the Spartans in the field but withdrew behind the walls of Athens. Later, after the Spartans withdrew, the Athenians took advantage of their superior naval power to conduct a naval

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[5] This statement assumes that the speech in Thucydides fairly represents the speech given by Pericles in 431 BC and is not an invention of his own after 404 BC. Thucydides himself asserts that he was faithful to his speakers' patterns of argument (Thucydides, History, 1.22). In the case of the Funeral Oration, at least, that claim seems reasonable.

[6] For analyses of the genre based on the scanty corpus of extant artifacts see Nicole Loraux, The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986); and John E. Ziolkowski, Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens, Monographs in Classical Studies, (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1981).

[7] Thucydides, 2.34.6.

[8] Thucydides, 2.65.9-10.

expedition against the coastal areas of the Spartan allies. Several battles took place, but again there was no major confrontation between the main armies of Athens and Sparta. The number of Athenian soldiers who died could not have been very large at this stage of the war.

The audience was made up primarily of the male citizens of Athens, although visiting foreigners were allowed to attend and are mentioned by Pericles.[9] The only women allowed were the close relatives of the dead.[10] Among the citizenry would be the former inhabitants of the villages and countryside around Athens who were newly urbanized because of the war. Athens was made up of many small neighborhoods known as demes. When the Spartans invaded, those citizens living in the demes in the countryside withdrew behind the city walls of Athens proper. Only direct orders from Pericles had restrained some of these citizens from marching against the Spartans when they saw their properties and villages devastated by the enemy. Many of the newly urbanized citizenry may have had questions about their own participation in Athens as a community since they seemed to be bearing the brunt of the war.

Under these circumstances, the need to shore up the citizens' identification with Athens as a community was evident. The Athenian funeral oration was especially apt for such a need because it addressed the exigences of the funeral situation by shoring up the community.[11] The two basic fitting

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[9] Thucydides, 2.36.4.

[10] Loraux, 24.

[11] This assessment relies on the concepts in Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (1968): 1-14. But the thrust of my analysis would also attenuate the strength of Bitzer's argument. For my analysis of effects assumes that Pericles' rhetorical choices affected future rhetorical situations.

responses for the general funeral situation seem to be lamentation and consolation. Lamentation, the outright expression of grief, was taken to be a woman's response in Athens and was not considered proper for the male citizen.[12] In line with this constraint, the traditional funeral oration in Athens aimed at consolation by transforming grief into pride.[13] The men who have died are men who have become good by their deeds (andron agathon ergoi genomenon) Pericles points out at the beginning of the speech.[14] For them to have become good, even if some of them were less than good in other ways, these men must be identified with the higher good for which they died.[15] That higher good is the idealized Athens that Pericles describes in the body of his speech. The speech becomes primarily a eulogy of Athens because in that way, the dead can be seen to have died fine deaths for a noble cause. So in the process of transforming grief into pride, Pericles enables the audience to define themselves as a noble community and to draw on that definition in justifying the deaths of their sons and fathers.

How does Pericles accomplish this? In two ways: he defines Athens by typical instances of what he claims it to be, and he defines it by opposition to what it is not. Some 90 years later, Isocrates would suggest that this method was the best way to praise the state. Isocrates taught that the one praising must not only discuss the state being praised but also compare it to

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[12] Loraux, 45.

[13] Loraux, 113.

[14] Thucydides, 2.35.1.

[15] Thucydides, 2.42.3.

some equal but different state--specifically Sparta.[16] Modern theorists have agreed that negation and opposition contribute to definition. De Saussure tells us that all linguistic signs are made up of differences.[17] Derrida adds that the very possibility of conceptuality depends upon a play of differences.[18] And in Burke, the negative is essential to dramatistic generalization.[19] Isocrates himself is simply observing what the genre prescribes, for the genre is agonistic and the antagonist is Sparta. The traditional interpretation of Pericles' Funeral Oration has emphasized its humanism; so the fact that it is bellicose, as are others of the genre, is often neglected.[20] Yet the emphasis on the antagonism between Athens and Sparta gives the speech a bellicosity that Pericles employs artistically in support of a strengthened sense of community.

In this case the antagonism is heightened by what Pericles omits from his speech. Normally the genre calls for a catalogue of great deeds by the ancestors of the dead. Among the traditional catalogue of exploits are the Trojan War and the struggle against Persia. Pericles' failure to include these exploits is an "abandonment of a panhellenic past."[21] His innovation in

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[16] Isocrates, Panathenaicus, 39-41.

[17] Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger; trans. Wade Baskin (1959; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 111-122.

[18] Jacques Derrida, "Differance," Speech and Phenomena, trans. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 140.

[19] Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: U of California P, 1966) 428.

[20] Loraux, 73, 96.

[21] Loraux, 71.

the genre was not his eulogy of democracy, even though it was more extensive than the usual, but his rejection of the catalogue of past exploits.[22] However, his failure to catalogue the panhellenic exploits makes sense when we observe that the overall pattern of his speech is to oppose the Athenian way of life to the Spartan. A mention of a past in which both cities shared exploits as allies would dilute the starkness of the contrast he is trying to create. It better suits his purposes instead to emphasize the ancestral contributions to the uniqueness of Athenian democracy.

Opposition is so essential to the way the speech operates that when Pericles begins to define the Athens of his own time, he actually begins with a negative characterization: the Athenian constitution does not imitate others.[23] This alludes to the belief that the Spartan constitution was copied from Crete.[24] And the audience must provide this belief as a missing premise for the implied antithesis. The Athenian constitution, on the other hand, as Pericles points out, is a model for others to copy. When he next states that the democracy of Athens belongs to the many not the few, the listener is again expected to supply the premise that the contrast is with Sparta's oligarchy. By suggesting the opposition of ideas but not fully developing the antithesis, Pericles is employing enthymematic antithesis. The listener completes the antithesis for him. In its simplest version, the enthymematic antithesis simply requires the listener to identify that it is the Spartans who are the subject of the antithesis. For example, the lack of suspicion in Athenian

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[22] Loraux, 372n234. Ziolkowski, 95.

[23] Thucydides, 2.37.1.

[24] Charles Forster Smith, trans., Thucydides, 4 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1928), 1: 322n1.

private life is contrasted with those who are resentful and grudging; the listener need only supply the fact that the Spartans are the sour-faced ones.[25] After the pattern of opposition has been set up, the listener can provide full premises. A series of statements on the leisure and luxury of Athens provides no contrary premises.[26] But the pattern is so well established that the listener almost automatically furnishes the antithetical statements: Sparta is toil and drudgery.

Pericles' use of enthymematic antithesis is not ornament without function as some commentators have supposed. One classics scholar refers to this pattern as the "new manner of overstrained antithesis" and considers it an imposition by Thucydides on the content of Pericles' speech.[27] On the contrary, this use of enthymematic antithesis serves the function of defining the Athenian community and at the same time provides further pleasure to the audience. As Rosenfield and Mader point out, "enthymemes give pleasure because their maximlike injunctions come to the audience as dramatic revelations." In addition, "quick apprehension is also pleasing; therefore, metaphor, antithesis, and actuality are lively forms of expression and the most pleasurable among the means of pointing to particulars."[28] So Pericles' adept use of the enthymematic antithesis is uniquely appropriate for his purposes.

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[25] Thucydides, 2.37.3.

[26] Thucydides, 2.38.

[27] Richard C. Jebb, "The Speeches of Thucydides," (1880) reprinted in Harding, 247.

[28] Rosenfield and Mader, 490.

To reinforce the antithetical pattern Pericles supplies more of the premises in a subsequent series of antithetical statements. He compares the openness of Athens with the xenophobia of the opposition. He notes that the Spartans invade with all their allies but the Athenians are able to conduct campaigns by themselves. And he contrasts the different sources of their courage--for the Athenians, their easy way of life, for the Spartans, the compulsion of laws.[29] Once the pattern is reestablished, Pericles allows the listener to provide the opposing premises for a series of statements about what it means to be Athenians--lovers of beauty and lovers of wisdom, public people who share in public life. The audience can consider the starkness of Sparta and its fear of openness without Pericles explicitly mentioning either. But to make sure the pattern of opposition is clear in the minds of the audience, Pericles regularly intersperses statements providing both sides of the contrast. For example, he tells his listeners that Athenians are both daring in action and willing to reason about an undertaking, but for others boldness is ignorance and calculation brings hesitation.[30]

By varying this pattern of enthymematic antithesis, Pericles builds a definition of Athens and a definition of non-Athens--primarily Sparta--in the minds of his audience. Athens becomes the model of excellence, the school of Greece. Sparta comes to stand for everything that is not excellent. By this means, Pericles succeeds in his purpose: he has identified the community of Athens with the highest of values. A man who died fighting for such a cause

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[29] Thucydides, 2.39.

[30] Thucydides, 2.40.

must indeed have died a fine death.[31] Those who remain should be convinced by the greatness of Athens and the example of the men who died to be willing to do the same for their country.[32] He concludes by justifying consolation, as opposed to lamentation, on the basis of the nobility of those who died and the continuing needs of the community. By the end of the speech, the abstract entity called Athens has been reinforced as the ultimate value in the lives of the listeners.

Here we have an indication of the working of epideictic rhetoric. But we also have a suggestion of its destructive power. For while he was reinforcing the sense of community of Athens by emphasizing its uniqueness, Pericles was undermining the larger cultural community of the Greek city-states. The rhetorical chasm that he created by his artful use of antithesis may have contributed to the ultimate collapse of Athens.

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[31] Thucydides 2.42.

[32] Thucydides, 2.43.

The Hidden Cost of Pericles' Rhetorical Artistry

The antagonism between Athens and Sparta was very useful for the building of a sense of community in Athens. That the rivalry was of long standing is evident from the fact that Pericles was able to develop his antitheses enthymematically. His audience had no difficulty providing the missing premises. This epideictic apparently built upon many other such events. But Pericles' Funeral Oration shows us the forces at work that made a negotiated settlement of the Peloponnesian War unlikely.

Athens had been part of a larger community, the community of Greek city-states. This larger community had recently successfully defended itself against a Persian invasion. But by repeatedly emphasizing the differences between Athens and other city-states, the rhetoric of Athens was denying the existence of the larger community. Once Athens defined itself outside the community of city-states, the language of diplomacy no longer worked.[33] By its rhetoric Athens conceptualized itself as a community in opposition to Sparta. The very identity of Athens relied on the process of opposition. A common Greek heritage and common interests were ignored for the sake of maintaining the strongest contrasts. At the same time, Sparta was reinforcing its sense of community with antithetical rhetoric. Thucydides also reports (although probably less reliably) the speech of the Spartan king Archidamus to the Spartan Assembly, in which Archidamus emphasizes the advantages of Sparta's conservative order. Archidamus contrasts the Spartan concept of order (eukosmos) and the strongest compulsory discipline (anankaiotaton

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[33] James Boyd White, When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 71.

paideuein) with what he saw as the Athenian disregard of law and custom and Athenians' useless education.[34]

The result of this antithetical definition of community by both sides was increased factionalism. The historian Cogan has observed that the war grew progressively ideological:

> The three major characteristics of the stasis [factionalism] that Thucydides describes are: the utterness of the opposition of parties, the destruction of any middle, neutral ground, and the distortion of thought and speech by the spirit of partisanship. All of these were the necessary, though most radical, extensions of the ideological conception of the war.[35]

And Cogan has noted the effects on ensuing rhetoric of this tendency toward ideological abstraction:

> Abstractions like ideologies carry with them a single, authoritative interpretation and its proper vocabulary, and these necessarily drive out all other alternatives. A further consequence of abstractness is that it enables men to draw oppositions which are both unequivocal and complete. In a material dispute, compromise is always possible. Where differences are drawn on philosophical or ideological bases, compromise is almost by definition impossible.[36]

In fact, what Cogan calls the "ideological conception of the war" was the

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[34] Thucydides 1.84.3-5.

[35] Marc Cogan, The Human Thing: The Speeches and Principles of Thucydides' History (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), 152.

[36] Cogan, 153.

result of the rhetorical construction of community by both competing city-states.

To the extent that the sense of community is built by rhetoric, then the failure to produce sustaining rhetoric can destroy that fragile construct we call community. The epideictic rhetoric of Athens, as typified by the genre of funeral orations, built the community of Athens at the expense of the larger community of city-states. After the collapse of relations between the city-states, Athens ended up alone and defeated. The Athenians had not noticed that they were part of a fragile rhetorical ecosystem. They nourished themselves at the expense of that system, and as a result they unwittingly destroyed the source of their own strength.

Conclusion

Before we condemn the shortsightedness of Athenian rhetoric or draw analogies to the superpower rhetoric of our time, we must remember that Athens was at war with Sparta. It would be most unusual if war rhetoric were not bellicose and antithetical. Communal cohesion at any time is, in fact, an act of synthesis that paradoxically depends on antithesis. Opposing elements within the community are united on the basis of their opposition to something else external to the community. I don't know that there is another method of building a sense of community. How do rhetors identify their group as unique without emphasizing its difference from others? Why do colleges play up their rivalries? The problem is that the rhetoric intended to solve the internal problems of communal cohesion in time of crisis also makes the resolution of that crisis more difficult. Antithetical rhetoric tends to drive the belligerents to insist on total victory because they come to construe each other as diametrically and essentially opposed.

The problem rhetors are faced with is analogous to the problem environmentalists have tried to call attention to in the physical sphere. In solving their local needs, producers cannot attend to a single entity or process and ignore its relationship to a larger ecosystem. The rhetorical problem is not the building of community at local levels, but the failure to recognize and nurture community at other levels. To define a community within a community requires both antithesis, emphasizing differences, and synthesis, emphasizing similarities, operating on several levels.

This movement of synthesis-antithesis at different levels can be seen in that other famous speech honoring war dead, the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln's purpose was not to reinforce the North's sense of community at the expense of

the South's, but to synthesize the two opposing sides into one nation. He accomplishes this synthesis by contrasting the nation's rebirth with the nation's death--the ultimate level of antithesis, Being versus Non-Being. Lincoln makes a similar move in his Second Inaugural Address by contrasting the imperfect humanity of both sides with the awful righteousness of God.

A more secular antithesis that operates at global levels is the image of Spaceship Earth, contrasting our planet with the fearsome unknown Otherness of the universe. Perhaps in some future time rhetors will have to rhetorically nurture the community of the universe, but until then global antitheses can be used to develop a sense of global community. And under the threat of nuclear war, Lincoln's antithesis of Being and Non-Being gains new and greater force. If rhetors paid their rhetorical dues of synthesis-antithesis at ultimate and intermediate levels of community, they would help insure a more ecological perspective towards the local sense of community.